

**FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LATE 1800s: A
Discussion of the Strength Of Women Created By Their
Isolation In Society.**

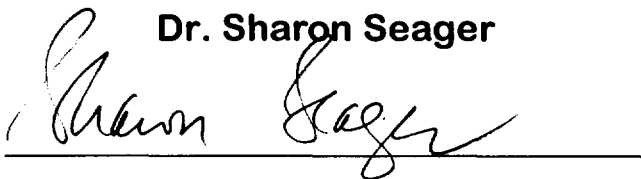
An Honors Thesis

by

Kathryn S. Hahn

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Sharon Seager

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sharon Seager", is written over a horizontal line.

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**FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LATE 1800s: A look at
the strength of women created by their isolation in
society.**

"What are little boys made of?
What are little boys made of?
Frogs and snails and puppy-dog's tails,
and such are little boys made of.

What are little girls made of?
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and everything nice,
and such are little girls made of.

What are young men made of?
What are young men made of?
Sighs and leers and crocodile tears,
and such are young men made of.

What are young women made of?
What are young women made of?
Ribbons and lace and sweet pretty faces,
and such are little girls made of. ¹"

It was 1920 in the United States when women finally gained the right to vote. It came after a long hard battle fought for centuries, and it was just the beginning of success. The women's suffrage Amendment was the culmination of the resurgence of the women's movement in the early 1900s. But the women who benefited from the new right were not the only ones responsible for the win. All of the women of the United States prior to the 20th century were part of the success their sisters claimed. They had bled and

not given them enough. They had not given them enough love to make up for their husbands and fathers' lack thereof. They had not given them enough knowledge and independence to change the world for the next generation of daughters. These daughters could only see that the women they were extensions of had failed them by leading them into the chains of womanhood.¹³

Women reacted to this dilemma in several ways throughout the late 19th century. The historical events of the time aided some women. As the industrial revolution grew, it gave more opportunities for women outside the home, thus widening their spheres and providing them a chance to achieve happier lives. "Women's employment grew by fifty-percent in the period of 1880 to 1900."¹⁴ But most futures, even though filled with change, still held broken hearts for daughters raised with their mothers who could never live up to their exaltations. Daughters wrote in diaries of strong romanticized attachments to their mothers. Lucy Howard, a poet, wrote of her mother, "I think I am in love with my beautiful mother...."¹⁵ This relationship was just beginning to interest psychiatrists in the end of the century including a great interest by Dr. Sigmund Freud

himself. Freud, an expert in sexuality, was one of the first doctors to examine this relationship.¹⁶

"We knew, of course, that there had been a preliminary stage of attachment to the mother, but we did not know that it could be so rich in content, and so long-lasting, and could leave behind so many opportunities for fixations and dispositions (Freud).¹⁷ "

This attachment was partially caused by the mothers themselves. "Mother experiences her daughter as an extension of self- a validation of her life as a woman.¹⁸ "

The ultimate independence that a daughter could reach was to separate herself from her very creator, and future. She had to see herself as independent from her mother in order to love her mother completely¹⁹ and to love her husband with the same whole-heartedness.²⁰

IRONY #3: Rejection of the future and the passive attempts to control it.

There were few outward signs of a daughter's conflict with her mother, but the one that is easiest to find today is a medical problem. Chlorosis, probably anorexia, was seen often in adolescent girls.²¹ Anorexia is, "a condition of self induced weight loss." It mostly inflicts females at a young age. Many factors can add to this disease, including the way society perceives self-pleasure. Anorexia

prevents the sufferer from successfully breaking bonds with her family.²²"

Anorexia was "an attempt, a refusal to accept, the dictates of 'true womanhood' by rejecting maturity,... and declaring herself different and separate from her mother-while...never confronting mother directly."²³ " This disease was a way for the daughter to draw a line between her and her mother. The bond of mother and daughter made identity fuzzy for the daughter and drawing that line gave the daughter a sense of some control.²⁴ The young female's life was completely controlled and all she could see in the future was the same problem. To outwardly deny this problem, would be to deny her mother's world which was the only emotional network the young girl had. So she turned her fear, her need, inward and became anorexic.

This disease also seems to be a reaction to the future as well as the present. Some young women saw marriage as slavery or at best a complete state of denial.²⁵ In order to prepare for the inevitable, they might have begun denying themselves the one thing in their current lives they could control--their food intake. In either case the disease belonged to young women who were desperately unhappy with

their places in the world and were trying, if only subconsciously, to gain some semblance of control.²⁶

The three ironies of the daughter-mother relationship epitomize the woman's life in the late 19th century. The fear began in her childhood and the desire for answers ate up her adolescence. She completely desired the person of her mother while rejecting with her body and soul the role of her mother. This confusion setting in at early ages set a course for women as they grew and matured. They needed other women to fill their emotional needs and they needed other women to understand, to empathize their eternal positions of suffering.²⁷

¹ Herman, Nini. Too Long a Child: The Mother-Daughter Dyad. London: Free Association Books, 1989, pg33.

² Theriot, Nancy. The Biosocial Construction of Femininity: Mother and Daughters in Nineteenth Century America. (New york: Greenwood Press, 1988), 93.

³ Theriot, 76.

⁴ Ibid, 81.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid, 77.

⁷ Ibid, 76.

⁸ Lerner, Gerda. The Female Experience. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 46.

⁹ Theriot, 84.

¹⁰ Herman, 210.

¹¹ Lerner, 43.

¹² Herman, 35.

¹³ Herman, 181.

¹⁴ Theriot, 94.

¹⁵ Ibid, 77.

¹⁶ Herman, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid, 25.

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- ¹⁸ Theriot, 45.
¹⁹ Herman, 223.
²⁰ Ibid, 185.
²¹ Theriot, 121.
²² Touyz, SW and PJV Beaumont. Eating Disorders: Prevalence and Treatment. (London: Willimas and Wilkins. ADIS PTY Limited, 1985), 3-8.
²³ Theriot, 123.
²⁴ Ibid, 76.
²⁵ Lerner, 45.
²⁶ Theriot, 125.
²⁷ Herman, 203.

Section B: Male Societal Dominance

Grating Diamonds over pearls...love gets confused as nails down a chalkboard, we are forced beyond girls. When you wake up a women stuck under a man, when passion gives him control, and breaks your upper hand, you have just realized the "American Dream." To hell with that! I have nothing to say to those 50 dead white guys that set my way. I have ideas and a life to live. Women need their own world -- WE need to dominate upon desire, to be the control, to force him to live the liar. Grating Diamonds over pearls...You spit on my soul and send it with love. Good God no wonder my hair curls. Confusion has ridden my brain. Poison is burning in the rain; it festers and waits till we fall in love, then blindsided we must see. Men control the world, but they won't rule me! Women join me please. we are the pearls and they the diamonds. It is time to sing together and end in a screech. Look at me adorn these heels, give me the height and make him reach. Then he will begin to see. We must be as that engagement ring-- Grating diamonds over Pearls...We join as one while the wedding chorus sings. This is not as it should be. No one needs the height, no one needs the power to tame. We are to live two lives as the same. Give me your heart not your ring. Grating diamonds over pearls...Listen with me to the ting as our marriage dies and our love believes. Be man and woman and let me live. then we will survive, I will be able to give, but break my feminine soul and rue the day. I can't be your wife if this is where you will keep me lay. Grating diamonds over pearls...Our love must transcend these sexist worlds.

--K. Hahn

This poem symbolizes the trap young women faced as they grew. They were stuck between a rock and a hard place without any hope of things actually changing to benefit them. They hung on for the ride. This ties into the upcoming section of the female life that led a woman into separation from men during marriage and childbirth.

Women leaned on each other in their own female network. The female network was very important in a woman's life, because it was the only emotional support she could count on.¹ From childhood through menopause, men and women were separated into a world that was dominated by Men and basically afraid of women. All the fears and stereotypes that women and men faced about the female sex were beginning to be legitimized by doctors of the 19th century.

These new doctors had just begun to discover gynecology, a booming area of study. Doctors could make names for themselves in an arena that people still knew little to nothing about. Instead of approaching this new field with empathy for the 1/2 of the human race that had been ignored for 2,000 years--the doctors approached it from the outside looking in.² They wanted physical answers to why women were inferior. They wanted to understand, why women did all those psychotic neurotic things when men were so normal. The male doctors that had only recently found ways to study the female cycle and reproductive capabilities saw these physical differences as the key to all female problems. After all, they couldn't blame themselves and their male society.

The 1800s were a time when gynecological doctors were exploding on to the scene. They were mostly interested in what they called, "female illness." "Women, most assuredly are more liable to insanity than men."³ It was a period of great expanse on the knowledge of women's bodies, but it was also a time of great isolation of women using this new medical knowledge to slant women as inferior and different.⁴ There are two things I want most to focus on with this new study of female sexuality--the doctor views and then the female views. Each side has a story driven by different interests, but both sides came to the same end.

First: The doctor's point of view.

For as long as man has existed, he has lived worked, played and reproduced side by side with a creature he can't understand. An alien that lies beside him at night and nourishes his children. He knows her body has the miracle capacity to bear life, and he knows this capacity affects the alien creatures entire occupation on this earth. He knows she is sexual. He also knows she can't be sexual in the same way he is because society has told him thus. Men

simply accepted that they knew all they were going to about females, until the mid-nineteenth century. This is when the doctors began to study these alien creatures called women. How should they begin to explain the differences between themselves and these foreign beings who share their race? Well, one way was to look to the one function that they could clearly establish as being of women -- her reproductive cycle. Doctors, "related female insanity to the reproductive cycle."⁵ One doctor of this mid 19th century time sums up the majority doctor opinion with these words. "Women's reproductive function defines her character, position and value, that this function influences and is influenced by an array of nervous disorders mandates the medical profession's superintendence of women."⁶

And with this the doctors dove into their studies of the female sphere. They decided that women are simply better off in their own worlds. It is best if they stick to producing children and making homes for any, "attempts to assimilate the female to the male mind, would not only fail but seriously injure women's health." The neurosis that woman often complained of was labeled insanity and blamed on the woman herself. She was trying to live in the man's

world, or she wasn't producing enough male children, or she wasn't creating the right home for her husband and that was why she was going insane.⁷

The doctors made a major scientific error, they didn't consider any other possible causes of the trauma in female lives.

Second: Through a woman's eyes

While the doctors were blaming women's problems on women themselves, women were finding their own answers. One answer revolved around the Victorian era. Men would go out into their work world and they would be placed under high stress of the booming capitalist time. When their day was over they wanted to escape. So, the women at home were expected to create perfection.⁸ They had to create the "Cult of Domesticity" the shelter for all that was good in life--religion, values, love. The Home was to be a "private sphere of love, emotions and domesticity...the sphere of women."⁹ This life was bound to be stressful enough to lead to many emotional breakdowns in women. They were expected to be the sole providers and creators of love for everyone

in the house. No one person can handle that kind of pressure. But the only other choice was to not choose marriage at all, which meant no love or companionship. Instead of giving too much they then would never give any.¹⁰ The feminists of the 19th century weren't helping women with this emotional problem either. They saw men as the enemy; so, their solution to keeping women sane was for all women to avoid all men. One feminist author of the 19th century wrote, "It is therefore that I would have women lay aside all thought, such as she habitually cherishes of being taught and led by men."¹¹

There were a few words of pure wisdom spoken at this time that didn't feed into the constant separation tactics that gynecologists and feminists were using. Dr. Showalter suggested that Victorian Male psychiatrists had an apparent fear of female sexuality.¹² Their only way to deal with sexuality in a woman was to classify it as foreign.

In reaction, what were woman saying and feeling about this position of separation they were forced into? The women who simply went along with the game decided that suffering made them more spiritual in the eyes of society. It gave them influence in some area with their husbands and

children.¹³ This feminine sphere gave women a psychological justification for their secondary position.¹⁴ They had reason for their place in life even if it was the result of societies brainwashing them into believing they were weaker and inferior and they had to live within the walls of the home to be safe.¹⁵

The women who didn't buy so easily into this male lie tried several techniques to be free. The feminists of the time struck out like cornered animals critiquing "male privilege, male power, men's position in society" and men's rights in family and law.¹⁶ They succeeded in bringing women's attention to their civil rights, but they also added to the isolation of women. Some midwives took a practical view of helping women. They began to realize that restrictive clothing and over work could be causing problems in women's periods and pregnancies.¹⁷

This view would be hard to understand for a woman in the mid 19th century, for she knew that all women before her had worked just as hard, and they had managed their lives fine for centuries. Something had to be wrong with her if she got nauseous during pregnancy, and severally depressed after birth. Martha Mears, a midwife, saw this problem in

women. She tried to teach women that they had to be proud of their pregnancies, and they had to understand that the emotional and physical symptoms were normal. Mears taught that each symptom of pregnancy should be celebrated, not hidden in shame.¹⁸ Women were used to hiding aspects of their lives that made them uniquely feminine. They hid such things as pregnancy, because it was different from men, and men were the norm in the society. If they did not hide the differences they were weird and could be considered insane.

Effects

Both the gynecologists' views and most of the women's views of their own sexuality during the latter end of the 19th century succeeded in the same end. They both separated women even further away from men. This appears in retrospect as a catastrophe. Today we are still trying to close the gap of understanding without causing either side to be submissive. But the effects of separation, in the short term, were not negative at all. These effects were necessary to evolve women into action. It began in the early 19th century when women saw their problems as related

to those of the slaves. They began strong involvement in the abolitionist movement as well as many other movements that began in this period of Great Awakening. They pushed for prohibition, because they suffered from men who drank too much and ran from the women to the alcohol.¹⁹ From involvement in these movements sparks of inspiration spread to the women's sphere. The fire had begun to smolder for their own rights and it was few when women were together. Thanks to the times, they were often together, forced that way by society. The single effect of separation was --

Power in Numbers.

¹ Theriot, Nancy. The Biosocial Construction of Femininity: Mother and Daughters in Nineteenth Century America. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 93.

² Mendus, Susan and Jane Randall. Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 192.

³ Mendus, 200.

⁴ Ibid, 197.

⁵ Ibid, 193.

⁶ Ibid, 192.

⁷ Ibid, 209.

⁸ Gorham, Deborah. The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 4.

⁹ Mendus, 197.

¹⁰ Motz, Marilyn Ferris. True Sisterhood: Michigan Women and Their Kin, 1820-1920. (Albany: SUNY, 1983), 18.

¹¹ Urbanski, Marie Mitchell Olesen. Margaret Fuller's Women in the Nineteenth Century. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), 101.

¹² Mendus, 203.

¹³ Theriot, 77.

¹⁴ Gorham, 5.

¹⁵ Mendus, 195.

¹⁶ Mendus, 244.

¹⁷ Ibid, 194.

¹⁸ Ibid, 196.

¹⁹ Urbanski, 160-167.

Section C: Marriage and Childbirth

I think you are the most amazing man I ever met. Can I hold you tonight, Can I give you my life? Can I offer you this black hole that has become my heart? With only God and earth to witness, we will swear our souls will never part. Our vows will not be of old like so much folklore, they will be of this land bred from dirt and hands so sore. I will promise to stay no matter how far I fall, I will promise to hold you no matter how little you call. I will beg your forgiveness, and pray you never give in; I will depend on you forever as if it's a sin. You need not promise me your dedication of you, my darling, I demand only your imagination... So stand by my side as I bruise and bleed, and step back away as I scream and need. I will stand by your side as you fill with rage, and I will back away as you lock this cage. Promise me as time tears us apart, you will hold onto my survival as I steal from your loss for if its truly forever, we will never question THE COST. --K. Hahn

Time to continue with the chronology of a girl. Now was the time in a woman's life to choose her own adventure. She could A: get married and bear children and live the domestic American Dream. Or she could B: go to college and then get married. Or still yet C: go to college and chose the part of the American Dream that was almost out of her reach--the capitalist dream of a career. Either path she chose, she had a hard road in front of her and the hope of little reward. The only reward she would find would be from the female network upon which she had a growing dependence for answers and aid. But at least, she did now have more choice than her mother had had.

The first path a young woman could chose led her into the bed of her husband. Before some woman married they had to have their debut.¹ This even, despite the fact that its outcome was focused on a man, had little to do with men. A mother would plan this singularly important event for her daughter, and during the time leading up to the debut the daughter would have to be submerged in the woman's world. She would have to learn all she would need to know for her upcoming years after marriage befell her. She would be in the sphere of women, untouched by men. A woman could literally spend months with only women.² "Married hostesses had a special responsibility to scrutinize their guest lists, eliminating anyone of dubious or even slightly racy reputation."³ The next major step in the marriage process would be the marriage itself.

"Marriage brought change; marriage brought hope."⁴

Marriage is the union of two people under the law. Today it can be for many reasons love, kids, loneliness, convenience or even for a green card, but for the women of the 19th century it was for necessity. The other options, before the end of the 19th century were living with siblings or getting a low

paying job.⁵ The benefit of marriage was it gave women a place in society that was their own.

The ritual of marriage is a public event. If a couple chooses not to have a formal wedding, witnesses still must be present. "Publicity is everywhere the element which distinguishes a recognized marriage from an illicit connection."⁶ Mostly who will witness a wedding is the couple's family. This is a new world for the young bride. She is now the part of her husband's family. The benefits of marriage for the female is that she broadens her support group. She gains her mother-in-law and any sisters her husband might have had. This means that the bride has more women in her female network. More women to visit, and care for, and in turn they will then be there for her during her times of need in the new marriage.

On the other hand, as soon as the marriage is complete the new wife becomes, "dead to the law."⁷ The only rights she retains(after 1948) are the rights to property she owned prior to the wedding, and anything left her by her parents. Also, now no matter how she was raised as a girl, possibly with some freedom and independence, the bride is, "urged to adopt a posture of submission" with her husband.⁸ She is

not encouraged to share her emotions and fears with her husband, for men had been raised to expect their women to be moral and on some higher ground.⁹ They weren't expecting romantic outbursts or signs of neediness. John C. Abbott, an author of marriage guides in the mid 1800s advised women to, "squench her own feelings."¹⁰ Suffering was the status a woman married into.

The first dilemma a new wife faced was sex. "A very large portion of the...unhappiness which many married people suffer arises directly from their forced ignorance."¹¹ For most women sex was completely foreign to them. It was even for some simply a duty to be performed because marriage was supposed to produce children. Society didn't teach women to explore their sexuality or to even feel sexual at all. It was accepted that females were, "seldom troubled with sexual desires."¹² It wasn't until the very late 1800s that any information about sex was available to a woman before marriage. A few doctors began to write books detailing scientifically the male and female sex organs and intercourse. The problem was they knew almost everything about men sexually, they had themselves to study, but their information on women was confused and often inaccurate.

They used female pigs and female dogs to study, to guess essentially, the female cycle.¹³ One book, a manual for men by a practical phrenologist written in 1842, says that the new bride will be frightened and unsure.¹⁴ Such information as this provided to young people only made women unaware of their true sexuality and needs in marriage. It was once again telling women that sex was the man's area and women were above it.

Mary Wollstonecraft, along with other popular fiction authors of the 1800s, was aware of the truth. She knew that women were then as always sexual beings capable of just as much perversion as men. This is why she used her female characters to teach women to take the moral high ground and not acknowledge those ruinous sexual desires.¹⁵ The cold truth for a young woman about to marry was that she knew nothing about sex. The realities were not even known for her to learn. Her only hope was to share her fears with other women and in turn gain some knowledge from their experiences.

Eventually though a women would get through the awkward stage of first time sex and then would come the inevitability of childbirth. Between the years of 1880 and

1889 on average for a woman 34.6 years of a 35.4 year marriage was spent bearing and raising children.¹⁶

Childbirth had to be a woman's entire occupation, but that didn't mean women looked forward to it, "only a few [women] could contemplate childbirth without fear and dread."¹⁷ The reality of the pain and danger of childbirth was seen by every woman when they aided in friends' and mothers' pregnancies. Not to mention that fact that little truth was actually known about the miracle of birth.

Notwithstanding, what was known pushed women into their own foreign category even more. New studies in 1800s discovered that "not only are the sexes different, they are different in every conceivable respect of body and soul."¹⁸ Male doctors were studying women the way they always had. They were making discoveries, but to the fault of the men-- and women who wouldn't let men examine them for moral reasons¹⁹-- the doctors were still looking from the outside in. They were still examining that alien creature that walked beside them all their lives.²⁰ Women didn't truly understand what their bodies were going through. They lived in, "terror of an accident...however the accident happens, the woman knows that she will always be held responsible."²¹

These lost women couldn't turn to anyone really--the doctors were still learning and midwives who might have been able to offer comfort were being forced out of the business. In 1847 one doctor in the field wrote, "in this country the midwife is very much out of date, belonging to a by gone."²² This marked the beginning of a new era in child birth. A natural occurrence that used to be isolated to and controlled by women, was changing. There weren't many things in life that men left to the women to take care of, but child birth had been one of those things. Now mothers and midwives had to stand back and let men take control of yet another part of female society. They pushed midwives out, and since women weren't allowed in the medical profession, essentially they were forcing women out of the woman's body.

This raises an interesting theory. The late 1800s were a time of female solidarity and action. It seems possible that the former midwives were forerunners for a strong female advance that developed after the turn of the century. Possibly when the men forced the midwives out of the birth process they triggered something. After all now women were completely out of a field that so ruled their lives, the

field of medicine. It seems entirely possible that it is this very exclusion that would alter create the female begun nursing profession.²³

It was in this atmosphere that mothers of the mid to late 1800s were raising their children and especially their daughters. Everything around them was changing in a fit of irony. Society was paying more and more attention to females, but it was simultaneously isolating women. It made women bizarre creatures, having nothing in common with men. They were put on display and inspected like animals in a zoo. Little did the men know that this process of isolation would later empower women to desire their rightful place at the sides of their men.

¹ Social Etiquette of New York. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887), 42.

² Theriot, Nancy. The Biosocial Construction of Femininity: Mother and Daughters in Nineteenth Century America. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 76.

³ Cogan, Frances. All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid Nineteenth Century America. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 150.

⁴ Lerner, Gerda. The Female Experience. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 43.

⁵ Theriot, 81.

⁶ Westernarck, Edward. The History of Human Marriage, Vol. II. (New York: The Allerton Book Company, 1922), 433.

⁷ Epstein, Barbara Leslie. The Politics of Domesticity: Women Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 77.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Barker-Benfield, G.J. The Horrors of the Half-Known Life. (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., 1976), 45.

¹⁰ Epstein, 78.

¹¹ Cogan, 192.

¹² Rosenberg, Charles(Ed). Birth Control and Family Planning in Nineteenth Century America. (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 33.

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- ¹³ Gallagher, Catherine and Thomas Laquer(Eds.). Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3.
- ¹⁴ Rosenberg-Smith, Carroll and Charles Rosenberg. Sex, Marriage and Society. (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 15.
- ¹⁵ Gallagher, 24.
- ¹⁶ Lerner, 45.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 46.
- ¹⁸ Gallagher, 3.
- ¹⁹ Mitford, Jessica. The American Way of Birth. (New York: Dutton, 1992), 160.
- ²⁰ Gallagher, 26.
- ²¹ Gelis, Jacques, translated by Rosemary Morris. History of Childbirth. (Boston: Northeast University Press, 1991), 66.
- ²² Mitford, 165.
- ²³ Ibid.

Section D: Higher Education

Nothing to lose, nothing to gain
 Passionless, pepressionless
 Too much adult without the fear
 Hold life at an arm's lenth
 In hopes of preparation.
 Hold the heart out to justice
 And skip all the elation.
 Are these the building blocks?
 Or just building dorrs with locks?
 Are they providing the keys,
 Or telling us anything which fears will ease?
 Winne-the-Pooh prepared me better.
 This has only numbed my soul, with
 Cold hearated hints.
 Kiss me and wake me my prince.
 Carry me through this bleak life of learning.
 Hold on--dig your fingernails in,
 When the thaw comes and you draw blood
 Life will begin.
 School will have redeeded to something of our past
 Life will drop us in mid-air,
 No one to tell us what is real.
 Only God to limit what we feel.
 Here in then will be my turn,
 To lift your heart and you will learn.
 --K. Hahn

Choice B for a young woman entering a new life was
 college. This choice was only available to a limited few
 women in he mid to late 1800s. It took family wealth to go
 to college, and it is precisely these wealthy women who
 later became leaders of the women's movement. So, this
 option of life must be examined.

Colleges have been around for centuries upon centuries some still in existence today can boast a rich an history as the country of the US can. But in the US, colleges were severaly limited institutions during the late 1800s. They were only open to the wealthy in society and until the end of the 19th century, they only admitted males. As the 1800s turned the corner of 50 years and began its descent toward the 1900s women's colleges began to pop up sporadically throughout the eastern US. Vassar was created in 1865, Smith and Wellesley in 1875, Bryn Mawr in 1883 all shortly followed by Mount Holyoke Seminary, Oberlin and Antioch. Other colleges for women also appeared at this time to expand a woman's choices for her future.

The focus of these school years is how they brought women together and how they empowered the few women who reached the educated level of society.

A woman had many socially accepted sexist beliefs to overcome as she faced college. As earlier discussed, the medical field was against women's progress in life. The current opinion of the medical field was that physiologically women had smaller brains, incapable of learning as a man learned.¹ Dr. Edward H. Clarke, the chief

spokesman for the medical opinion against women's learning, said that women could not stand such mental activity. "For the energy used by her brain would be diverted from her dominant organ, the uterus, and she would be incapable of fulfilling her true function."² Some people clearly feared women becoming educated beyond the home. If a woman was learning more than what she needed to know to be a good mother and good wife, then she would eventually want to use this new knowledge. She would venture outside the home into the man's world. It wasn't the basic idea of women going to college that caused the hostility, but rather that the, "curriculum...asserted women's intellectual ability and equality."³ The problem was there were different kinds of women's colleges starting in the late 1800s.

The first kind of colleges were the ones which taught women the traditional courses. These didn't scare the outsiders as much, because they weren't encouraging women to be more than they already were. They centered on things society expected women to learn. Mount Holyoke Seminary taught women to teach, an occupation that the fairer sex had been involved in since the 1700s.⁴ The colleges of Hartford, Ipswich and Troy fell into this same genre.

Except, they were even a step down from Mount Holyoke; these colleges did not teach women a skill. They taught women how to be more appealing wives.⁵ They acted as finishing, charm schools teaching women the finer points of being a wife in a high class society. Similarly, Oberlin and Antioch colleges for women were, "neatly segregated in a woman's curriculum." They taught women differently than they would have taught the men.⁶

Colleges were progressive in existing for women at all. They were promoting the idea that women's time could be used for something other than motherhood. If in no other way than pushing marriage to a later stage in a woman's life. A few colleges were making an even bolder move for women in the late 1800s. These institutions were denying the cries by society that it was outrageous for women to study the gentlemen's subjects of math, science, Latin and the complicated language of Greek.⁷ A few of these advanced schools were Wellesley College, Vassar, Bryn Mawr and Smith College. All of these were begun by women for women.⁸ Carey Thomas the, feminist president of Bryn Mawr, summed it up best. She stated that some women were trying to tell

college girls that they could be intelligent, well-educated members of society and still be "womanly."⁹

These daring colleges tried to teach their young women this lesson in many ways. One was through female educators. When Wellesley College began only three of its twenty-nine professors were male. Another way they tried to expand the horizons of the privileged women of the late 1800s was with the courses themselves. Vassar had an easy route to take. It was set outside of Boston surrounded by the country's top male schools. The founders of Vassar simply designed their curriculum to provide women with the same education their brothers and cousins were getting at Harvard and Yale.¹⁰ Wellesley's twenty-nine professors taught economics, physics, botany, the arts, English, history, biblical history, political science, Greek, literature, philosophy and psychology, and chemistry. Closing in on the turn of the century Bryn Mawr, the college of Carey Thomas, offered fellowships to women who wanted to study abroad.¹¹ This was daring for families to allow. A young woman could travel unchaperoned to Europe--most likely. In the late 1800s in Europe the women's movement was well under way. Study abroad could easily open a young ladies mind to many new

things unexpected in the socially conservative world of the United States.

But no matter how liberal or progressive colleges got, there were always the same underlying problems. Most women did not attend college; they were not given the ability or the option to do so. Secondly, of the small percentage of these women who did get to college, few would use it for anything except educating their future children and catching their future husband.

The separation of women into their own colleges, and mostly their own curriculums were not the only isolation factors acting on women. As a result of the growing college experiences the isolation techniques used by directors of colleges kept women from experiencing the freedoms that today's college life can bring. When these new colleges were being formed they faced many challenges adapting a traditionally male life style to women.

The first challenge was the living situation. Men who went to college in the late 1800s could expect large amounts of freedom. They could come and go from their homes as they chose. They could even live where they chose. But unlike the male experience, women could not be allowed such

unbridled freedom. The women who went to college in this time period, were from the highest economic stratospheres of American society. They did not have independence from getting jobs, because jobs for them were unnecessary. They would have if it weren't for college, gone from their fathers house to their husband's, where they would have constant supervision from older women. So when these women chose college, society created ways to keep these women under supervision. They had curfews, bed checks, campus guards, and housemothers.¹²

The second challenge was also with housing, the fear that housing women together in too large of facilities would alienate women from their domesticity. They would lose their ability to function in and run a proper household. So when Sophia Smith founded Smith College, she insisted that the housing have small capacities.¹³ On top of the fear that women would lose their domestic tendencies was another fear of large housing complexes modeled after men's dormitories. Administrators feared the women would rebel against the college.¹⁴ This housing problem, although it most likely seemed huge to the colleges at the time, was one of the more trivial problems facing the new colleges.

One of the two larger problems the new colleges faced was institutional. These colleges were looking for the best and the brightest young women, for higher education at the time was not for every student who could afford tuition. Unlike today, to go to college in the late 1800s was an elite privilege given only to the best and the brightest. When Wellesley College opened her doors, 314 women applied for admission. Of these 314 only 30 were qualified for the standards Wellesley required.¹⁵

The problem with qualification was the preparation. Young women's high school equivalent experiences were not enough to prepare the ambitious women headed for college. The few who did gain enough pre-college knowledge had usually benefited at home. They were taught by a proud father or male family member. An example of this was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leader in the early women's movement. Elizabeth's father raised her to be the best at everything. He tutored her in all the typically male subjects. Because of this special attention Elizabeth was qualified to attend college.¹⁶

This lack of preparation meant small numbers of women attending colleges compared to their male counterparts.

Small numbers might not have been completely bad or those college graduate women who sought careers. "Careers and jobs for women were limited...teaching and the growing fields of secretaries," were almost all that was available to the new grads.¹⁷ Since it took wealth for a woman to make it to college, most likely she would not have to work after graduation. If she didn't want a job or could not find one, she could turn to supporting the arts or dedicating herself to charity.¹⁸

College had an interesting effect on women and their futures. It took wealthy women who had some desire to be more than their mothers and gave them the tools to do just that. It also isolated women from male educators and from the sexist levels of society. College has a way of empowering a person to believe she can do anything. In the late 1800s this empowerment added to several other factors in causing a new group of women in discontent with their status in society. It worked like a formula:

EMPOWERMENT+EDUCATION+FEMALE NETWORKS=THE NEW WOMAN

Yet these new women would use their education their money and their time for one more beneficial step on their way to the resurgence of the women's movement.

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- ¹ Marchalonis, Shirley. College Girls. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 30.
- ² Marchalonis, 37.
- ³ Ibid., 41.
- ⁴ Ibid., 24.
- ⁵ Ibid., 49.
- ⁶ Ibid., 26.
- ⁷ Ibid., 29.
- ⁸ Ibid., 117.
- ⁹ Ibid., 45.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 116.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 19.
- ¹² Inness, Sherrie. Intimate Communities: Representation and Social Transformation in Women's College Fiction, 1895-1910. (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State College Popular Press, 1995), 76.
- ¹³ Inness, 99.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Glasscock, Jean(Ed.). Wellesley College 1875-1975: A Century of Women. (Wellesley, Massachusetts: Wellesley college Press, 1975).
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Marchalonis, 112.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.

Section E: Labor Unions and Volunteers

pull my spirit from my soul
 exult me to ultimate control
 rip me tear me heat me scare me
 you have the power to test my thrill
 kill me fulfill me
 God created life today
 God tore down walls
 threw destinies away
 He controls and abides my soul
 He knows my horrors
 and creates my designs
 He blows that snow
 He lights this sky
 He is the moon
 He is the hurricane
 the fury and the eye
 He told the sun to shine today
 He told the earth to heal thy way
 He above wretched my being
 He above empowered my seeing
 He is the only to be
 He thy God created this
 day for me

--K. Hahn

The last piece in the female connection of the late
 1800s was the charity movement. Women played a unique role
 in this volunteer stage of the Second Great Awakening
 movement in the United States. The Second Great Awakening
 was a moral movement that grew as a reaction to the
 Industrial Revolution. Many people felt the horrors brought
 on by too rapid of industrialization, and they reacted by

seeking higher ground. The movement was religious and moral.

Women of the upper-middle classes who had the opportunity to go to college could not all get jobs, there simply weren't enough. A few of the women were content with not using their new educations, but the ones who weren't needed another outlet. These women chose to use their educations and their energies for improving the world around them. Women involved themselves in creating settlement houses to shelter and educate the poor. Some other women took their time to the abolitionist movement. The remaining women concentrated on the toughest cause of all, they looked at aiding the women workers of the lower classes.

The workers and the middle-class women were destined to have a different relationship. This was caused partially by the working woman's world inherently. Working women were a new commodity in the United States. Several factors had led to their necessity in society.

The Industrial Revolution that provided the jobs for the working women's class came in the late 1800s. The deaths from the Civil War combined with the westward migration in the 1860s, "had depleted the number of

marriageable men in New England.¹" The side effect of this was more women needed to enter the work force. Factory workers were in demand to create the new products of the revolution and keep America competitive. Especially in the Northeast where the revolution had first spread from Europe. It wasn't completely a survival method for women, "factory work meant that possibility of developing skill, experience,...a sense of independence, self respect, and sisterhood with other women aside from family loyalties and community ties."²

These benefits such as the emotional ones, were small for any factory worker caught in the beginning flourish of the industrial age, but they were even less for the women. Women started their own labor unions to help themselves. They were fighting against the same problems as the men, low wages, bad working conditions, and long hours. The work force might have been more powerful had they joined together, but the men were not ready for such a progressive move. They could not see the benefits of joining the women. All they could see was that the women's causes were taking attention away from them. Men wanted the women to put their own wage grievances aside and work for the men's issues.³

Women wouldn't give in to the men's wishes, they were fighting for compensation for their own wage discrepancies. So women formed their own strike meetings.⁴

One of these meetings resulted in the shoe workers of Massachusetts starting the Daughters of St. Crispen in 1868 to protect their interests.⁵ These unions focused on the issues of being a factory worker, but they did it through the female eye. These unions were no less active than their male counterparts. "Involvement in the labor movement throughout the nineteenth century indicates a female tradition of activism and autonomous organization."⁶ These female labor unions even began to join forces with each other. Strikes like the New England shoe strike of 1860 brought women workers together.⁷

These women workers usually lived together as well as worked together. They came from distant places and sent money home. Those women who remained unmarried were usually the ringleaders of change. "Clara Brown, a 21 year old unmarried factory worker, emphasized the power of sisterhood as the basis of the female labor protest."⁸ Such leaders as Clara Brown had more time and energy left over after work to creat the protests and the strikes. The married women had

too much else to do, but the unmarried leaders were able to inspire these women to take some time for action if not planning.⁹

The women who led the union movements not being married probably didn't worry about how the strikes looked. The women they were attempting to lead on the other hand, probably did worry. That is why the movements became a branch of the moral movement in the country at the time. The strikes managed to make the working class woman fit into the classic view of womanhood. "The view of womanhood expressed by the striking journeymen in 1860 was accepted by many [workers at the Lynn shoe factor because it] emphasized self-sacrifice, family loyalty, and female moral power." The women were sacrificing their wages to strike for better conditions for all workers. They were asking for shorter work days so they would have greater time to spend with their families. Most importantly, they were bonding together to reach their common goals.¹⁰

Not all of the female labor strikes were spurred by working women on the inside. The women with even more time and energy to spend than the single factory workers were ready to get involved. These were the middle class women

already involved in the women's rights movement or temperance movements coexisting. They saw the problems of their sisters in the factories, and they saw the potential strength of a unification of all women across class lines. If it had been possible to ignore wealth differences the women would have been unbeatable.

The early unions joined together with suffrage as a goal, but after only a year of existence suffrage had slipped to the background of the goals they wished to accomplish.¹¹ The Daughter's of St. Crispen Labor Union rejected the middle class women's desires to help organize their strikes and unions.¹² Even Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, two of the founders of the new women's rights movement, tried to pursue the joining of forces. Although they had success at first, it was short lived.¹³

It was not that the factory workers did not want suffrage, or that they changed their minds about it along the way. These women wanted their rights just as much as the middle class wanted them to have the rights, but the workers were trapped in a tug of war. They wanted what the middle class women sought, and they could see the benefits of

joining forces, but the problem was that the working women could not relate to the middle class women. The disparities of time and wealth were just too big to overcome. They caused the women to go separate ways in the same pursuit.¹⁴ Occasionally the women did succeed in working together such as in the New England shoe strike of 1860 when the working and middle classes joined as one unit.¹⁵ The middle class women had the knowledge, ability and time to organize the movements on greater scales than the workers could have.

The educated women also saw another goal in joining forces together. If they weren't ultimately concerned with women's rights they were working for better moral standards in the factory workers lives. Some middle class women such as the leaders of the Women's Union for Christian Work (WUCW) felt that middle class women, "melting on the common ground of womanhood was the only way to improve the morality of working women."¹⁶

These women concerned with the morality issue came from yet another aspect of the volunteer workers. They too were crossing the class lines of middle and working class women to better society, but they were completely dedicated to the cause of morality. They set up houses called settlement

homes to offer a refuge for working women to spend their free time. They offered books and reading rooms to keep women from pursuing less desirable free time activities in the urban areas. The WUCU also kept lists of approved boarding houses that were safe for women to reside in without compromising their integrites.¹⁷

One of the most famous settlement houses was Hull-House. It was founded by Jane Addams in 1889 in the urban center of Chicago. Jane Addams believed, "that the dependence of the classes on each other is reciprocal."¹⁸ Volunteers of her new shelter came quickly from the upper north side mostly, and they shared Addams views. They felt it was natural to care for the under privileged. The reward was a feeling of accomplishment and emotional fulfillment.¹⁹ The volunteers for Hull-house were mainly women educated and unemployed. The residents were also mostly women who needed shelter. Hull-house not only provided shelter, it provided reading groups and classes for the community to better themselves in hopes of higher moral standards for the city. Hull-House women found strength in their group. They even started extraneous clubs to reach outside of Hull-House. One club walked the streets of Chicago reporting unsavory

conditions.²⁰ Settlement houses such as Hull-House were established in the urban centers of large cities all over the east. They were products of the Industrial Revolution. Women led the movement that wanted to clean up the negative effects of increased industrial life.

Jane Addams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and all the other dedicated, educated women of the late 1800s were ahead of their time. They desired peace and rights for women of all classes, but in many ways they failed to relate to the working women. The working women such as the Daughters of St. Crispen and Clara Brown formed their own strong movements for civil rights. They would aid the cause at the turn of the century for all women's equal rights. This aid would not come without the constant battle with the middle class women as to how the movement should proceed. Both groups were fueled by strong sisterhood bonds created by their lifestyles. These bonds were even strong enough to overcome the controversy among the very ranks of women themselves.

¹ Blewett, Mary. We Will Rise in Our Might: Working Women's Voices from Nineteenth Century New England. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 11.

² Blewett, 18.

³ Ibid., 79.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷ Ibid., 76.

⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹² Ibid., 106.

¹³ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 76.

¹⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹⁷ Ibid., 95.

¹⁸ Addams, Jane. Twenty Years at Hull-House. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

²⁰ Ibid., 166.

The women of the late 1800s started their lives learning from their mothers. They learned to depend on women for emotional needs. They learned to be strong, for their life would be one of suffering. As they grew older they had a decision to make. If they chose to marry, they learned new lessons. They learned that they only existed through their husbands. For the first time, they were measured through their children, and not for themselves. If they chose to go to college, they were completely isolated away from men. The colleges were not co-educational, and few men taught or ran the women's colleges. They were women's worlds. Either decision a woman made could lead her later to volunteer work. This was fed by movements in society at the time, and it was led by women.

Each stage of the woman's life during the late 1800s led to the same thing. Women were isolated from men, by doctors, males and other women in society. The structure of the law kept them submissive, and the structure of society made sure they could only express themselves to other women. This was unique to the late 1800s, and it was its charm. It seems to me that if it weren't for societies discriminations the successes women made in the early 1900s would never have happened. Women gained their strength and their power from

each other. They were one anothers outlets for love, joy, hate, and pain. They needed other women to not only become better, but to basically survive. If women had not been pushed to the edge of live, and limited to only the "Cult of Domesticity," they would not have pushed for the rights they deserved.

The late 1800s isolated women from mainstream society, and from their rights. It was a tragic state of affairs for the women who suffered through the changing America. It is true that their lives were filled with confusion, but if it weren't for that isolation and confusion, the 1900s never would have seen the suffragettes or women's rights. Society had been building up to the women's rights movement for centuries. It subtly separated men and women further apart as the 1800s wore on, but this was destined. It is always darkest before the dawn. The late 1800s were the dark spot in American women's history, when they could only depend on each other for all their needs. The 1900s saw the dawn as a direct result of the late 1800s and the success of their female networks.

God planted a tree the day Adam and Eve met, and in
the late 1800s it died without warning without hope,
one strike of lightening all lack of cope. If He'd have
known that was how it would end, today a river
would run where its dainty branches bend. Was it
worth all that effort building society so neat as a pin,
filled with rules and lies and men's alibi's just to see it
die struck down from above? We could assume
women just weren't meant to be or,
We could cling to each other, my sisters, and simply
say hold on, your hope will live in me.

--K. Hahn

I married for hope and ended up cold, I bore children
for futures and ended up sold. So this is the end one
after the other no time to recover, no time to prepare,
one moment bright future, one moment blind dispare.
Next is a pale horse the judgment day said, I wish it
would hurry meantime PLAY DEAD.

--K. Hahn

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